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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature concerning a conceptual model that specifies the antecedent variables that produce selective exposure and the mediating variables that justify why a person selectively exposes himself or herself to information. Two advantages accrue from the model described in the literature. First, the model enhances the development of a theory for predicting accuately the existence of selective exposure. Second, the model increases the ability to control the selective exposure phenomenon. The author concludes by saying that this model is still in the preliminary stage of development and may undergo further alterations. (RB)

A MODEL OF THE SELECTIVE EXPOSURE PHENOMENON

By

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INTRODUCTION

If there is one proposition that is believed to have reached the privileged plateau of a law, it is that people tend to seek information that they find similar or supportive of their own attitudes and beliefs. Unfortunately, this proposition does not enjoy the same degree of empirical support that it has in popular support among social scientists. After a literature review, Mills (1968) states:

> In summary, the current evidence concerning interest in supporting and discrepant information warrants the conclusion that people tend to seek out supporting information and avoid discrepant information.[1]

After reviewing essentially the same literature, Sears (1968) states:

> There is no empirical evidence indicating a a general preference for supportive information over nonsupportive information regardless of whether the test is conducted under neutral, high-dissonance, or low confidence situation.[2]

Two major problems exist in the research literature; solutions to these problems could help resolve some of the controversy.

First, the research literature has largely ignored the investigation of antecendent variables leading to selective exposure. In other words, what variables develop the attitudes and beliefs that produce the desire to seek consonant information? If we could specify such variables, we could move toward developing a theory that would allow us to predict the situations which we would expect selective exposure to be a factor.

Second, the literature has largely ignored the set of mediating variables that may occur after a person has made the decision only to expose himself to messages that are similar to or supportive of his own. In other words, what is the rationale a person uses to justify why he has decided to expose himself to messages that support his attitudes and beliefs? Does one say that the source advocating a contrary position lacks credibility, or does a person indicate that

he has better things to do with his time than to listen to information in which he is not interested?

Because the literature has tended to ignore these two areas, we have not been able to model the selective exposure phenomenon. This paper proposes a model which specifies both antecedent variables and mediating variables in the selective exposure process. The paper also suggests a mode of analysis for the model.

The model described in this paper refers to selective exposure as the process whereby people show a preference for information that supports their attitudes and beliefs. This definition assumes a person will constantly monitor incoming information for its perceived support or nonsupport and selectively expose himself only to belief-congruent information. Furthermore, selective exposure is a process which implies that a model must take into account that material one judges as belief-congruent may change over time. Thus, a person may selectively expose himself only to belief-congruent information but that information may not represent the same position, depending upon the person's attitudes and beliefs at any given time.

This definition delineates two important variables in the selective exposure process. First, selective exposure implies a comparison between the perceived message position and the person's own position. This comparison is termed attitudinal similarity. When a person uses attitudinal similarity as the criterion to determine exposure, he will compare the message position with his own largely on the basis of his preconceived notions of what the message will be. For example, a person who is a strong Democrat will have some notion of what a Republican politician will say on an issue before the Republican speaks. Thus, the person will be able to compare this position with the message on the basis of his preconceived notions (whether or not they are accurate).

It should be noted that in some situations a person may accidently expose himself to contrary information because of inaccurate perceptions of the source's position or a lack of information upon which the person can make a judgment of the source's position. In these cases, the person may expose himself to the message until it becomes obvious that the position is different, then ignore the message and avoid it in the future.

Research by Carter and Simpson (1970) indicates that people tend to stop reading a communication that is inconsistent with their position in order to disagree with the message or ask clarification about it. Further, people tend to stop reading communications more frequently when the message is inconsidtent with their position than when the message agrees with them or presents a neutral position. However, their research did not give subjects the option of refusing to read any more of the message. Each subject and to continue reading until the end of the article although they could stop temporarily. Thus, some support is provided for the idea that some accidental exposure to nonsupportive communications may occur but the likelihood is high that the person will cease exposure to nonsupportive messages.

The second important variable in this model's definition of the selective exposure process is actual exposure to the messages. In this model, exposure is assumed to take place over time; in other words, exposure can only be determined by looking at a person's exposure in a number of situations. Only by over time measurement can we accurately assess a consistent preference for supportive information rather than an accidental exposure on the basis of inaccurate perceptions or lack of information.

As with any model, certain conditions must be met before predictions are made from the model. Four conditions must be met before this model is operational.

First, as indicated earlier, time is an important condition. Before

we can make judgments about exposure, we must be able to examine exposure patterns overtime.

Second, the model assumes that a person has some degree of information about an object. The processes hypothesized in the model require that the individual is cognizant of his attitudes, other positions taken toward the object and certain attributes of other people taking positions on the topic. The model would not predict well for objects about which a person has no information.

Third, the model assumes that exposure is voluntary. The person can make a rationale choice about what he wants to expose himself to devoid of physical coercian by external forces. This does not mean that a person may not feel social or internal pressure to expose himself to alternative points of view. Actual physical force to make the person expose is not present.

Fourth, it is assumed that the person has alternative sources available. It should not be the case that the person must rely on a source because no others are available. Not only should the person not be physically coerced but he should not be forced to expose only because he has no other sources.

Selective exposure, as defined by this model, can be tested by correlating attitudinal similarity with exposure to messages. The model would assume that a high positive correlation between attitudinal similarity and exposure would be indicative of selective exposure. Thus, the model predicts the follwoing:

1. As attitudinal similarity increases, exposure to the message increases.

Antecedent Variables

This model assumes that there are two antecedent variables that affect a person's decision to selectively expose himself to belief-congruent information: amount of interaction with the attitudinal object and the variance in message positions previously received about the attitudinal object.

The influence of the amount of interaction with the attitudinal object on selective exposure is derived from a model developed by Woelfel (1972).

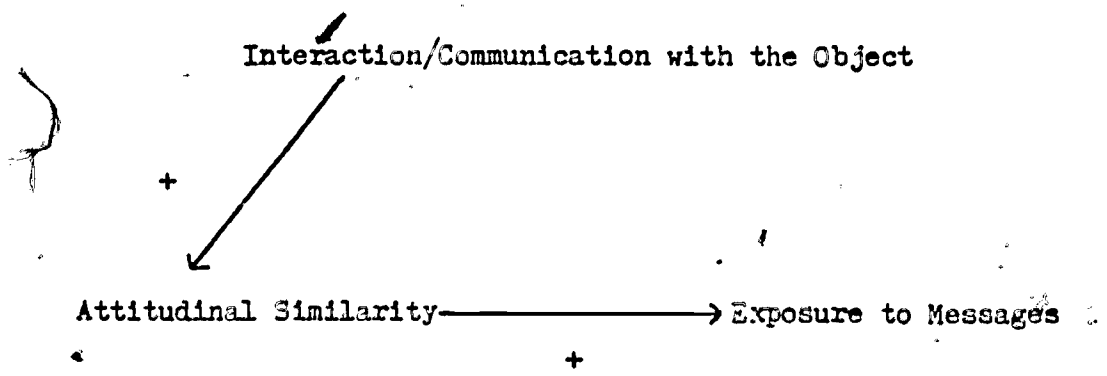
Woelfel argues that a person's attitudes are developed through two kinds of interaction with an attitudinal object: self-reflection about experiences with the object and communication with significant others about the object. Specifically, Woelfel argues that a person's attitude will converge on the mean rate of behavior expected by his significant others.

Research has tended to support this position. Using a linear information model that assumes a person's attitude will converge on the mean value of all incoming messages, Woelfel and Haller (1970) accounted for 64% of the variance in high school students' educational aspirations, primarily on the basis of the average educational expectations of their significant others. Mettlin (1970) replicated these results on another sample with similar success. Woelfel and Hernandez (1970) accounted for 86% of the variance in the usage of marijuana based on usage by significant others. Similar results have been extended to such topics as attitudes toward French Canadian Separatists (Woelfel, et. al., 1974), cigarette smoking (Mettlin, 1970), and the extent to which children perceive television as real or fantasy (Reeves, 1974).

If the linear information model is accurate, we should expect that interaction with an object and interaction with significant others about the object should result in some attitude about the object. Furthermore, the model assumes that as the number of interactions with the attitudinal object increase and communications about the object increase, the stability of the attitude increases. Saltiel and Woelfel (1972) found that attitude change in inversely related to the amount of information

a person had, measured as the amount of interaction about the object. If amount of interaction acts as a resistor to attitude change, we would expect that it would also act as a resistor to exposure to nonsupportive messages. In other words, if the amount of interaction acts as a conservative influence on attitude change, it might also operate as a conservative influence on a person's exposure to contrary information since it is a factor of stability.

In this model of selective exposure, we assume that the number of interactions with an object and communications about an object are positively related to attitudinal similarity; as the number of interactions and communications increase, the more important attitudinal similarity becomes to the decision to expose oneself only to supporting information. We would expect a path to exist between interaction and communication about the object to attitudinal similarity, and then to exposure. The path is represented below:



The second hypothesis results:

2. As interaction with an object increases, selective exposure increases.

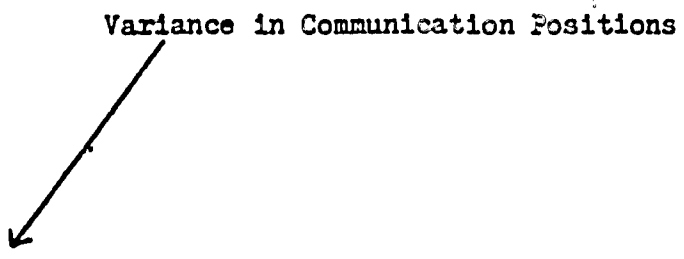
The second antecedent variable is the variance in the message positions previously received about an attitudinal object. This assumes

that variance in message position will result in a person seeing other positions as being reasonable to listen to if not acceptable.. In other words, as the number of positions a person has heard voiced in the past increases, the likelihood decreases that the person will ignore a position because it is different.

Research paradigms in the area of cognitive style tend to assume that homogeneity in communication positions can influence a person's cognitive style. The more homogeneous the influence the more authoritarian or dogmatic the person tends to be. The more authoritarian or dogmatic the individual, the more likely he will expose himself only to supporting information.

Saltiel and Woelfel (1972) found homogeneity or heterogeneity in information about a topic independent of attitude change. While homogeneity is not a significant influence on attitude change, it may act as an impediment to receiving contrary information. That is, it may not be able to stop attitude change, but it may resist the attempts of a communicator to be heard in the first place.

Thus, a path may be drawn between the variance in communication positions to attitudinal similarity to exposure to supporting messages.. The less variance in communication positions the greater the importance of attitudinal similarity in determining exposure to messages. The path is presented below:



The third hypothesis results:

3. As the variance in communication positions decreases, selective exposure increases.

Two antecedent variables that should produce selective exposure have been posited in this model. It should be noted that the model assumes selective exposure may occur as a result of either variable, but the strongest prediction of selective exposure occurs from both variables in conjunction. We would expect that a person with a large amount of interaction and communication that conveys the same information (low variance) about an object would be the most likely to selectively expose himself to supporting communication.

Mediating Variables

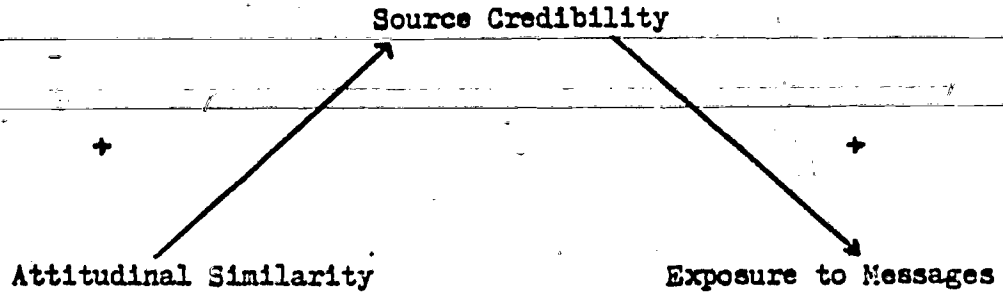
There are five mediating variables that could be used to rationalize selective exposure: source credibility, effort, alternatives, anxiety and interest.

The credibility of the source of a message could be affected by how similar his perceived position is to the receiver's position resulting in exposure to or avoidance of the message. Source credibility is defined as the receiver's attitude toward the source of a message at any given time. In this case, the attitude toward the source before the message is presented will determine the exposure to the message. The model assumes that if the receiver perceives the source as having a position that deviates greatly from his own, the receiver will not expose himself to the message. If, on the other hand, the source has a perceived position that is similar to the receiver's, exposure will occur.

Two sets of research tend to support the position of the model. First, research findings by Aronson, Turner and Carlsmith (1963) and Brewer and Crano (1968) tend to support the conclusion that as deviation from a receiver's position increases, source derogation increases. In other words, we would expect the greatest source derogation to occur in situations in which the source has a perceived position that is significantly different from the receiver's. Both of these studies investigated attitude change as a result of high, medium or low discrepancy from the receiver's position and source derogation. The relationships between discrepancy and attitude change become nonlinear in high discrepancy situations. This nonlinearity was in conjunction with source derogation. Thus, we know that at least for attitude change, source credibility is influenced by attitudinal similarity.

The second set of research has been conducted in the area of attitudinal similarity and attraction. Byrne and Clore (1966) found that a positive linear relationship between reported similarity of attitudes of a stranger and a person's liking him. In this research we note that a person will be attracted to or will like someone who holds attitudes similar to his. We might extend this analysis from attraction to exposure. That is, the greater the person's attitudinal similarity, the greater the attraction and the greater the exposure to him.

Thus, the model assumes that a path can be drawn from attitudinal similarity to exposure to supporting information. Attitudinal similarity is positively related to source credibility and source credibility is positively related to exposure to messages. The path is represented as follows:



The fourth hypothesis results:

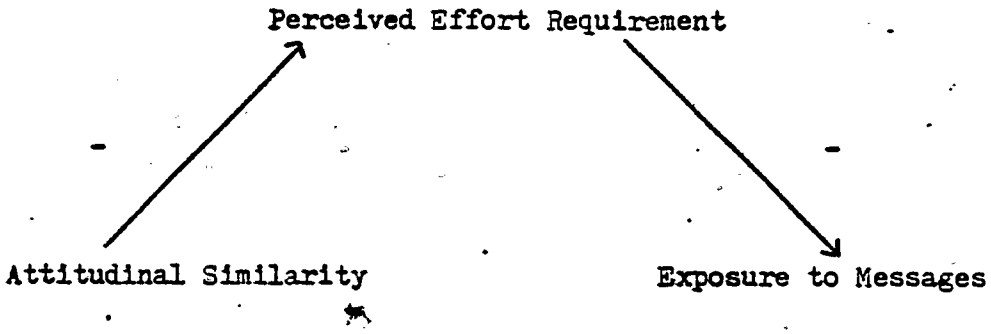
4. As attitudinal similarity increases, source credibility increases and exposure to messages increases.

A second mediating variable is that of perceived effort required to expose oneself to the message. One might view effort as a communication cost that one only wants to incur for some reward. Indeed, one can argue that people want to expend the least amount of energy in order to get the greatest returns (Homans, 1961).

In the case of nonsupporting information, we might expect the rewards to be perceived as being small. Indeed, we might argue that receiving nonsupporting information may be psychologically stressful (Dissonance theory). Thus, the cost in energy to expose oneself to the message may be greater than the reward. In this case, we would expect that exposure to nonsupportive information would be less.

However, if a person receives supporting information, the rewards may be great enough to warrant energy expenditure. For example, the gratification that someone else shares your beliefs may be sufficient reward to warrant the expenditure of energy. In this case we would expect that exposure to supportive information would be high.

The model assumes a path between attitudinal similarity and perceived effort requirement to exposure to messages. There is a negative relationship between attitudinal similarity and perceived effort requirement, and a negative relationship between perceived effort requirement and exposure to the messages. The path is presented below:



The fifth hypothesis results:

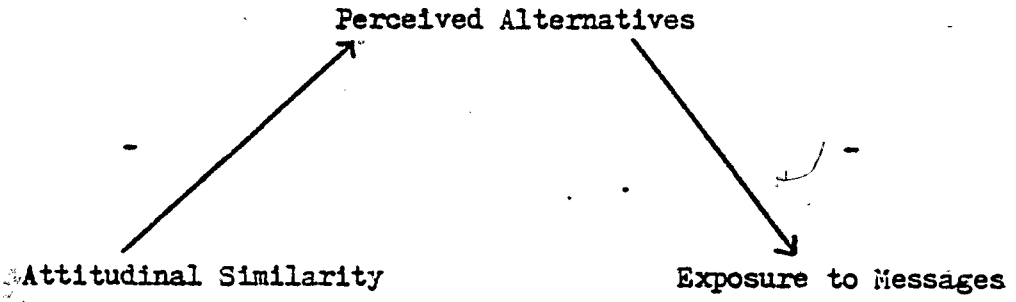
5. As attitudinal similarity increases, effort decreases and exposure increases.

The third mediating variable is the number of available alternatives. If a person perceives his position to be similar to a source's, he may be less likely to expose himself to alternative stimuli. We might argue that if a person finds a source that is more attitudinally similar to himself, he may find that source to be more rewarding to him than other sources, particularly if the other sources are less attitudinally similar to him.

Thibaut and Kelley (1959) have argued the position that people often determine their relationships on the basis of the rewards they have received from the relationships and comparisons with alternative sources that could provide rewards. If another alternative could provide more reward for the individual, he may turn his attention to that alternative.

In the case of selective exposure, if an alternative source could provide more reward, the person would turn to that source. If a source is attitudinally similar, the likelihood that the person will perceive other sources as being more attractive is less than if the source is perceived as being attitudinally dissimilar.

Thus, the model assumes that a path can be drawn from attitudinal similarity to alternatives to exposure. There is a negative relationship between attitudinal similarity and the number of perceived alternatives, and a negative relationship between the number of perceived alternatives and exposure to messages. The path is presented below:



The sixth hypothesis results:

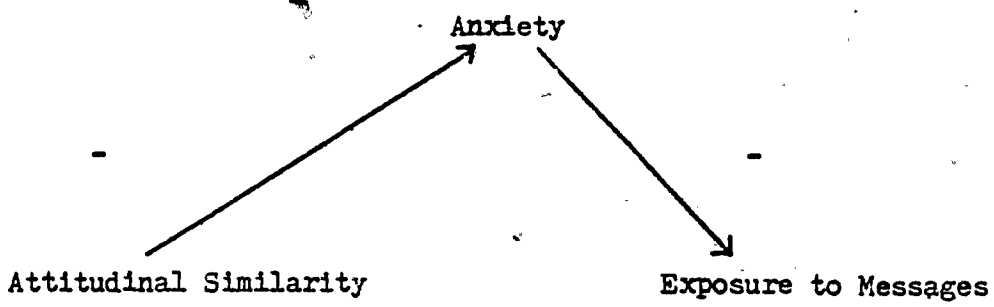
6. As attitudinal similarity increases, the number of perceived alternative stimuli decreases and exposure increases.

The fourth mediating variable in the model is anxiety. We might argue that a person has a preference for supportive information because of some anxiety resulting from hearing nonsupportive information. Nonsupportive information may be anxiety producing if it lowers the certainty that a person made a correct decision or if the person finds that his self concept is threatened. In any case, nonsupportive information may produce an increase in anxiety.

In the case of selective exposure, the knowledge that some message contains nonsupportive information may increase a person's anxiety even though he does not hear or read the message. The anticipated anxiety may produce sufficient stress to prevent the person from exposing himself to the message or, at most, allow only for a very short exposure.

Supportive information provides the advantage of decreasing anxiety. That is, supportive information tends to increase the certainty that one is correct which tends to decrease anxiety about one's decision. We would then expect the person to expose himself to supportive information.

The model predicts a path from attitudinal similarity to anxiety to exposure to messages. There is a negative relationship between attitudinal similarity and anxiety, and a negative relationship between anxiety and exposure to messages. The path is presented below:



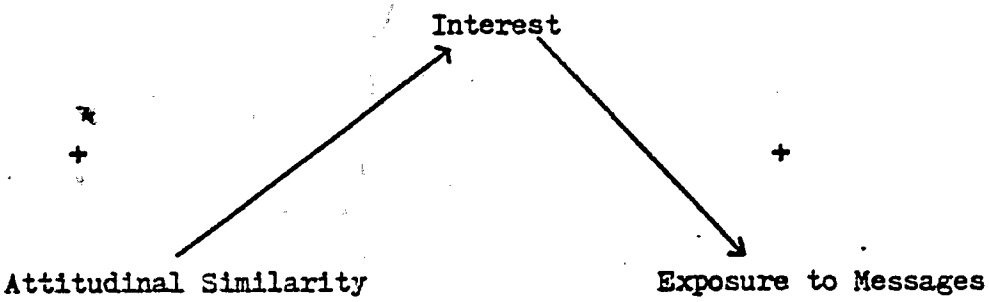
The seventh hypothesis results:

7. As attitudinal similarity increases, anxiety decreases and exposure increases.

The fifth mediating variable is interest in the attitudinal object. A person who finds that a source holds views similar to his own may find the attitudinal object more interesting than a person who finds a source disagrees with him. For example, a person who finds a speaker on

economics holding views similar to his own may become more interested in economics than a person who finds the speaker disagreeing with him

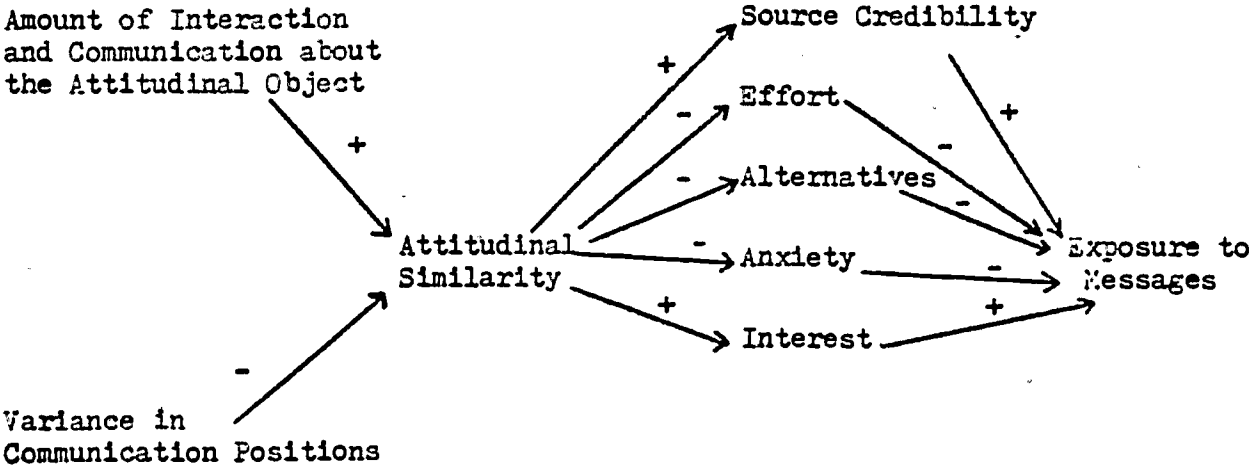
The model assumes a path can be drawn from attitudinal similarity to interest to exposure to messages. The model predicts a positive relationship between attitudinal similarity and interest, and a positive relationship between interest and exposure. The path is presented below:



The eighth hypothesis results:

8. As attitudinal similarity increases, interest increases and exposure increases.

This model of the selective exposure phenomenon consists of two antecedent variables and five mediating variables. The complete model and paths appear below:



Eight hypotheses about the relationships between the antecedent variables and selective exposure and attitudinal similarity, and the mediating variables and selective exposure are derived from this model:

1. As attitudinal similarity increases, exposure to the message increases.

2. As interaction with an object increases, selective exposure increases.

3. As the variance in communication positions decreases, selective exposure increases.

4. As attitudinal similarity increases, source credibility increases and exposure to messages increases.

5. As attitudinal similarity increases, effort decreases and exposure increases.

6. As attitudinal similarity increases, the number of perceived alternative stimuli decreases and exposure increases.

7. As attitudinal similarity increases, anxiety decreases and exposure increases.

8. As attitudinal similarity increases, interest increases and exposure increases.

A suggested mode of analysis to test this model follows in the next section.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology suggested for this model is path analysis: a system designed to test models that assume direct and indirect causal paths among the variables. By positing exogenous variables, endogeneous variables and residuals, one can plot and test the paths suggested by the model. Exogenous variables are variables whose values are assumed to be determined by variables outside the model itself. These variables serve as a set of fixed referents against which effects in the model can be measured. As a consequence the determination of exogenous variables is not an issue in the path analysis. For example, variables such as parent's occupation, perceived family income and other demographic variables have been used as exogenous variables in other studies.

Endogenous variables are variables whose values are determined by other variables, either exogenous or endogenous, which are in the model. In other words, endogenous variables are assumed to be determined by some other variable within the system regardless of whether it is an endogenous or exogenous variable. In this model, variance in communication positions, amount of interaction, attitudinal similarity, source credibility, effort, alternatives, anxiety, interest and exposure are endogenous variables.

The residuals are composed of influence from variables not included in the model, errors in measurement and other disturbances in the relationships predicted by the model.

A path diagram of this model of the selective exposure phenomenon is presented in Figure 1. It should be noted that this path model only includes paths of hypotheses derived from the model. Additional paths could be drawn and tested other than the ones suggested by the model. Discussion of that procedure follows later in this section.

Prior to testing the model using path analysis, one must meet the assumptions of the path analysis. Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1974) indicate four such assumptions:

(1) The relations among the variables in the model are linear, additive, and causal.

(2) The residuals are not correlated among themselves, nor are they correlated with the variables in the system. The implication of this assumption is that all relevant variables are included in the system. Endogenous variables are conceived as linear combinations of exogenous variables or other endogenous variables in the system and a residual. Exogenous variables are treated as 'givens.' Moreover, when exogenous variables are correlated with themselves, these correlations are treated as 'givens', and remain unanalyzed.

(3) There is a one-way causal flow in the system.

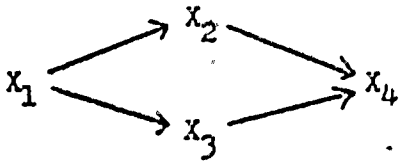
(4) The variables are measured on an interval scale.[3]

If one meets the assumptions of path analysis, the analysis proceeds. By establishing a regression equation for each endogenous variable using other endogenous variables and exogenous variables as predictor variables, one can determine the appropriate paths between the variables. In path analysis the beta weight for the variable is representative of the path coefficient. By removing the variable paths in the equation and recomputing the correlations among the residuals, one can determine the influence on the path or beta weight.

A number of criteria may be used to determine when a path should be removed from the equation. First one may consider the correlation between two residuals. For example, assume that the correlation between residual b and residual g in Figure 1 are correlated highly (.50 or greater). In this case, several interpretations are possible: (a) some unmeasured variable exerts influence over both variables (source credibility and exposure to messages); (b) two unmeasured variables exert influence over both variables; or (c) the path may be misspecified (reversed). In any case, the model has not correctly specified the relationship and the path can be rejected. By following such a technique through the various equations one can eliminate paths and provide a parsimonious model.

A second criterion often used is the significance of the path coefficient. One may specify a certain significance level that a path coefficient should have and reject those that do not reach that level.

A third criterion that can be used is how well one can reconstruct the correlation matrix using the path coefficients. For example, with a model such as the one below,

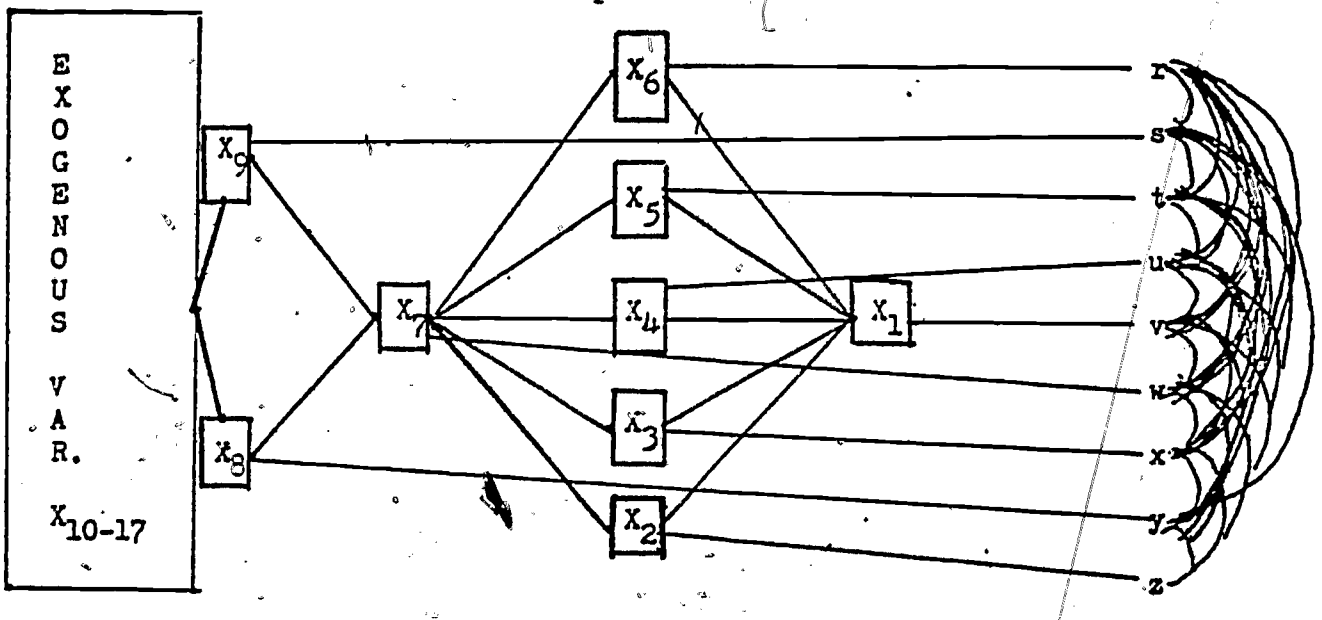


one ought to be able to approximate closely the correlations between X_2 and X_3 and the correlations between X_1 and X_4 using the path coefficients. For example, r_{23} should be approximated by $p_{31}p_{21}$. Closer analysis of this system is given by Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1974).

Kerlinger and Pedhauzur indicate that no rules exist for assessing "goodness of fit" for path analysis criteria. In the case of residuals

Figure 1

A Path Diagram of the Model of the Selective Exposure Phenomenon



Where:

X_1 = Exposure to Messages
X_2 = Interest in Attitudinal Object
X_3 = Anxiety
X_4 = Alternatives
X_5 = Effort
X_6 = Source Credibility
X_7 = Attitudinal Similarity
X_8 = Variance in Communication Positions
X_9 = Amount of Interaction and Communication about Attitudinal Object
X_{10-17} = Exogenous Variables
r-z = Residuals

the researchers make a decision regarding some level of correlation among the residuals as being too high to tolerate. For the second criterion, researchers tend to rely on the significance level of .05 for the rejection of a beta weight. In the last case, researchers compute the significance of the difference between the actual correlation and the approximated correlation from the paths. Again the .05 level of significance is often used. Thus, some degree of subjectivity exists in the selection of all criteria.

The suggested path analysis for this model of the selective exposure phenomenon involves the use of (1) correlations among residuals and (2) reconstruction of correlations. However, prior to the path analysis, it is necessary to make some modifications in the model.

Initially we could investigate certain exogenous variables, previously unspecified, that could create antecedent variables. Saltiel and Woelfel (1972) suggest several exogenous variables in a similar study. They focused on father's level of educational attainment, subjective relative wealth of the family, father's occupational prestige level, year in school, age and sex. We might add geographical area of home, religion, membership in social groups, grade point average, major, personal income, personal occupational prestige, marital status and birth order. These variables would provide a broad number of exogenous variables that would prevent the model from being underidentified. That is, the more exogenous variables used in relation to the endogenous variables, the greater the strength of the path model.

Second, we could posit alternative antecedent conditions that might provide a comparison with the ones suggested by the model. For

example, Mills (1968) suggests that the certainty of the individual may affect the person's decision to expose himself to supportive information. An additional example may be the person's commitment to the position. The more committed the person is, the greater the likelihood the person will expose himself only to supportive material.

Third, we could investigate alternatives to attitudinal similarity that could cause a person to use the mediating variables to justify his exposure to messages. A person might visualize two other reasons for using the mediating variables to justify his exposure. First, a person might view the source of a message as having a great deal of perceived status or power. This would mean that a person may expose himself to a nonsupportive message because the source is perceived to be powerful or important. As a result, a person may expose himself to the messages because the source was credible, little effort was required, no alternatives existed, it reduced anxiety and was interesting. This would indicate no selective exposure, as defined in this model, because the person exposed himself to a message not attitudinally similar on the basis of the perceived power or status of the source.

A second alternative reason might be the importance of the message to the individual or to others. It is possible that some message ingredient other than attitudinal similarity may prompt the decision to expose. If the message is important, the person may see the source as credible, little necessary energy expenditure, few alternatives, reduction in anxiety and increased interest. Again, selective exposure, as defined here, is not occurring since a person would expose himself to important messages regardless of the similarity.

The suggested path analysis for the model is diagramed in Figure 2.

The equations for Figure 2 are as follows:

$$X_{13} = p_{13,14}X_{14}+p_{13,15}X_{15}+p_{13,16}X_{16}+p_{13,17}X_{17}+p_{13,18}X_{18}+p_{13,19}X_{19}+p_{13,20}X_{20} +p_{13,21}X_{21}+p_{13,22}X_{22}+p_{13,23}X_{23}+p_{13,24}X_{24}+p_{13,25}X_{25}+p_{13,26}X_{26}+p_{13,27}X_{27} +p_{13,n}n$$

$$X_{12} = p_{12,14}X_{14}+p_{12,15}X_{15}+p_{12,16}X_{16}+p_{12,17}X_{17}+p_{12,18}X_{18}+p_{12,19}X_{19}+p_{12,20}X_{20} +p_{12,21}X_{21}+p_{12,22}X_{22}+p_{12,23}X_{23}+p_{12,24}X_{24}+p_{12,25}X_{25}+p_{12,26}X_{26}+p_{12,27}X_{27} +p_{12,r}r$$

$$X_{11} = p_{11,14}X_{14}+p_{11,15}X_{15}+p_{11,16}X_{16}+p_{11,17}X_{17}+p_{11,18}X_{18}+p_{11,19}X_{19}+p_{11,20}X_{20} +p_{11,21}X_{21}+p_{11,22}X_{22}+p_{11,23}X_{23}+p_{11,24}X_{24}+p_{11,25}X_{25}+p_{11,26}X_{26}+p_{11,27}X_{27} +p_{11,w}w$$

$$X_{10} = p_{10,14}X_{14}+p_{10,15}X_{15}+p_{10,16}X_{16}+p_{10,17}X_{17}+p_{10,18}X_{18}+p_{10,19}X_{19}+p_{10,20}X_{20} +p_{10,21}X_{21}+p_{10,22}X_{22}+p_{10,23}X_{23}+p_{10,24}X_{24}+p_{10,25}X_{25}+p_{10,26}X_{26}+p_{10,27}X_{27} +p_{10,z}z$$

$$X_{9} = p_{9,10}X_{10}+p_{9,11}X_{11}+p_{9,12}X_{12}+p_{9,13}X_{13}+p_{9,p}p$$

$$X_{8} = p_{8,10}X_{10}+p_{8,11}X_{11}+p_{8,12}X_{12}+p_{8,13}X_{13}+p_{8,u}u$$

$$X_{7} = p_{7,10}X_{10}+p_{7,11}X_{11}+p_{7,12}X_{12}+p_{7,13}X_{13}+p_{7,x}x$$

$$X_{6} = p_{6,7}X_{7}+p_{6,8}X_{8}+p_{6,9}X_{9}+p_{6,o}o$$

$$X_{5} = p_{5,7}X_{7}+p_{5,8}X_{8}+p_{5,9}X_{9}+p_{5,q}q$$

$$X_{4} = p_{4,7}X_{7}+p_{4,8}X_{8}+p_{4,9}X_{9}+p_{4,t}t$$

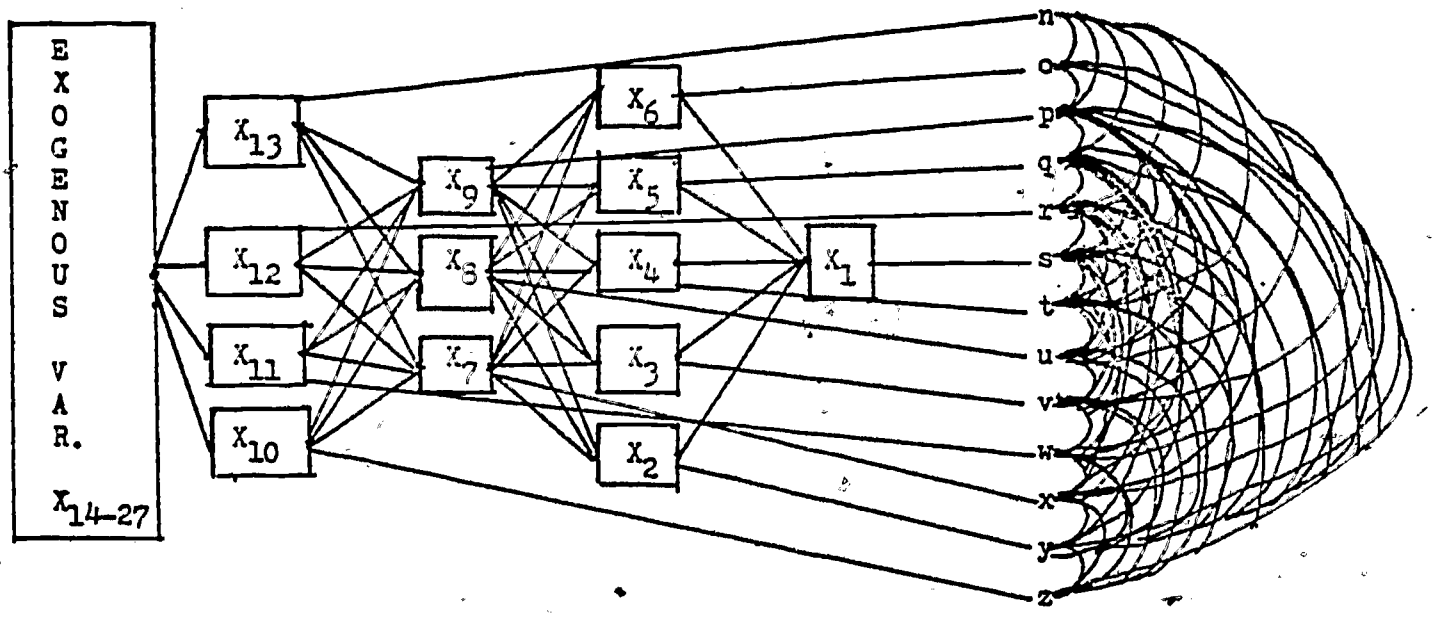
$$X_{3} = p_{3,7}X_{7}+p_{3,8}X_{8}+p_{3,9}X_{9}+p_{3,v}v$$

$$X_{2} = p_{2,7}X_{7}+p_{2,8}X_{8}+p_{2,9}X_{9}+p_{2,y}y$$

$$X_{1} = p_{1,2}X_{2}+p_{1,3}X_{3}+p_{1,4}X_{4}+p_{1,5}X_{5}+p_{1,6}X_{6}+p_{1,s}s$$

Figure 2

A Path Diagram for the Model of the
Selective Exposure Phenomenon
and Alternative Variables



Where:

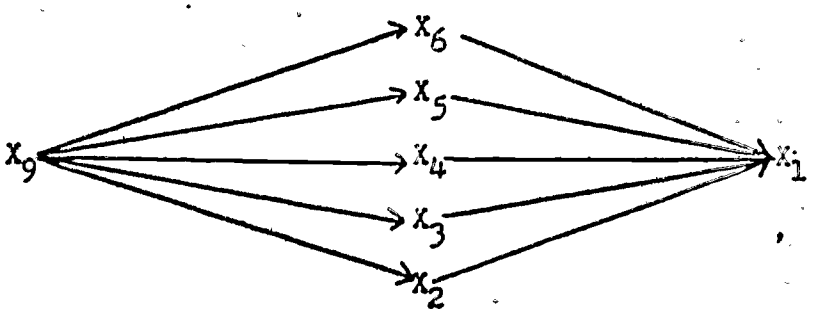
X_1 = Exposure to Messages
X_2 = Interest in Attitudinal Object
X_3 = Anxiety
X_4 = Perceived Alternatives
X_5 = Perceived Effort
X_6 = Source Credibility
*X_7 = Importance of Message
*X_8 = Perceived Power of Source
X_9 = Attitudinal Similarity
*X_{10} = Commitment to Attitudinal Position
*X_{11} = Certainty of Attitudinal Position
X_{12} = Variance in Communication Positions
X_{13} = Amount of Interaction and Communication about Attitudinal Object
X_{14-27} = Exogenous Variables
n-z = Residuals

*Alternative Variables Added To The Model

By correlating the residuals with each other, we can determine the appropriate paths. If a correlation is above a specified level, the path would be dropped from the equations; the equations would be recomputed and the correlations between the residuals would be compared in order to determine the next path to eliminate. If the model predictions hold, only two antecedent paths should remain. There should be a path between the variance in communication positions and amount of information to attitudinal similarity. And, there should be only one path to the mediating variables: the path from attitudinal similarity. If we find only the path from attitudinal similarity to the mediating variables, a further analysis could be undertaken to investigate the paths among the mediating variables.

The additional test of the mediating variables would include a slightly different procedure. Kerlinger and Pedhazur (1974) describe a procedure whereby we can determine the paths among the mediating variables by examining the fit between the correlation produced by the path coefficients and the actual zero-order correlation. The residuals are assumed to be uncorrelated before this analysis begins so they are not included in the analysis. The analysis would focus on attitudinal similarity and the mediating variables. This could be done from the paths obtained in the first analysis using the residual criterion.

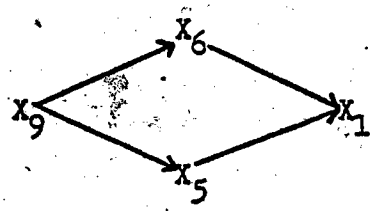
This path diagram is represented as follows:



Where:

X_9 = Attitudinal Similarity
X_6 = Source Credibility
X_5 = Effort
X_4 = Alternatives
X_3 = Anxiety
X_2 = Interest
X_1 = Exposure to Messages

In order to simplify the explanation of this analysis, we will focus on only four of the variables in the model:



Where:

X_9 = Attitudinal Similarity
X_6 = Source Credibility
X_5 = Effort
X_1 = Exposure to Messages

In this situation, the model assumes that there is no path between attitudinal similarity (X_9) and exposure (X_1) and no path between source credibility (X_6) and effort (X_5). According to Kerlinger and Pedhazur, if the model is correct, we should be able to reproduce from the path coefficients the zero-order correlation between attitudinal similarity and exposure and the zero-order correlation between source credibility and effort.

The model assumes that the following paths will be tested:

$X_1 = e_1$
$X_6 = p_{6,9}X_9 + p_{6a}a$
$X_5 = p_{5,9}X_9 + p_{5b}b$
$X_1 = p_{1,6}X_6 + p_{1,5}X_5 + p_{1c}c$

If we want to reproduce the correlation between source credibility (X_6) and effort (X_5), we would use the path coefficient between attitudinal similarity (X_9) and source credibility (X_6) and the path coefficient between attitudinal similarity (X_9) and effort (X_5). This equation appears below:

$$r_{6,5} = p_{6,9}p_{5,9}$$

If this equation accurately reproduced the correlation (no difference greater that the .05 level of significance), we would proceed to the following equation:

$$r_{9,1} = p_{9,6}p_{6,1}+p_{9,5}p_{5,1}$$

If both equations are reproduced to some acceptable level of accuracy, the path would be accepted. If not, other paths could be hypothesized and tested using the same system. Thus, the most appropriate paths could be discerned. Both the antecedent variables and the mediating variables can be tested using path analysis.

Conclusions

This paper has provided a conceptual model that would specify the antecedent variables that produce selective exposure and the mediating variables that justify why a person selectively exposes himself to information.

Two important advantages accrue from this model. First, the model will enhance the development of a theory from which we can predict accurately the existence of selective exposure. By specifying the antecedent variables, we can predict the situations in which we think

the selective exposure phenomenon will occur. Further, it will allow us to predict the extent to which we expect selective exposure to decrease the influence of our persuasive messages; this will have some impact on developing models of attitude change.

Second, the model will increase our ability to control the selective exposure phenomenon. If we think we have found the roots of selective exposure, we can do something about them. If we have found the rationalizations for selective exposure, we can develop programs to combat them. In any case, the exploration of such a model could certainly be developed within a context of policy research whereby we could directly attempt to make practical use of the model.

Obviously, this model is only at a preliminary stage of development and may well undergo alterations; but it does provide a conceptual and operational step forward.

FOOTNOTES

[1]J. Mills, "Interest in Supporting and Discrepant Information," in Theories of Cognitive Consistency ed. by R. Abelson, E. Aronson, et. al. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), p. 775.

[2]D. Sears, "The Paradox of De Facto Selective Exposure Without Preference for Supportive Information," in Theories of Cognitive Consistency ed. by R. Abelson, E. Aronson, et. al. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1968), p. 786.

[3]F. Kerlinger and E. Pedhazur, Multiple Regression in Behavioral Research (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1973), p. 309.

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